



CANADA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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ROCK CORNISH GAME HENS

We have been hearing quite a bit about Rock Cornish Game Hens lately. You may have seen them in a supermarket or in a fancy restaurant.

These birds were developed in the United States about 10 years ago. Only recently have they been raised in Canada.

If you are interested in raising Cornish Hens you must be prepared to produce a high quality product in a regular quantity. They require special handling in production and marketing.

Rock Cornish Hens are 4½ to 6-week-old broilers weighing 16 to 17 ounces when oven-ready. They are produced by mating a Cornish Game male bird to a White Rock female. The Cornish breed is used to obtain a plump body and full breast as this is the first secret of production. The name "Rock Cornish Hen" implies females but both male and female are included.

Twice as many chicks can be raised in the usual floor space because they are usually killed by the time they are six weeks old. Allow one-half square foot per bird. They must be fed a high protein ration (21-25 percent). A high calorie ration is necessary to speed growth and obtain good finish.

The quickest method of sorting is to kill the cockerels first – at 4½ to 5 weeks and the females a week later. Uniformity of birds is very important in Rock Cornish Hens for merchandising. To avoid killing birds that are too small, the grower might weigh each bird before killing. Birds should weigh one and one half pounds live weight to dress out to the desired 16 to 17 ounces. They may vary from 14 to 18 ounces.

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These young birds are very tender and bruise easily. They can be scalded at 140°F.; this removes the outer skin. They must be thoroughly cleaned and picked for a high quality product. They are packed in tight fitting plastic or polyethylene bags so that the bag fits the contours of the bird. They are quick frozen since the demand is not constant. Some producers pack them in boxes or bags bearing their trade name.

Rock Cornish Game Hens are served whole and they are indeed a delicacy: They are highly prized among the more exclusive restaurants and hotels. They retail at around 90 cents a bird. That sounds like a wonderful price for a bird weighing only a pound. However the original cost per chick is the same, as well as the cost of brooding and dressing them. Then there is extra time spent in packaging. The growth stimulant and more expensive feed make extra costs. The main gain is in the shorter period of feeding and the doubled production in the brooder house.

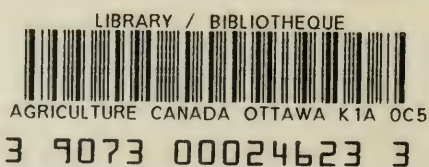
This product requires special merchandising methods. A prospective grower would need to be sure of a market. Supermarkets, food specialty shops and fancy restaurants are the best outlets. The market is continuing to expand. A grower would first have to contact a hatchery, feed dealer, processor and prospective buyer in order to be sure of having all the facilities and a market.

Photograph:

Left: A Rock Cornish Game Hen. This little bird weighs about a pound when dressed out.

Right: An ordinary broiler, shown to give a comparison of size with the Rock Cornish Hen.

Evelyn Couch Walker
Farmer's Advocate,
Nov. 29, 1961



SQUAB BROILERS

(ROCK CORNISH GAME HENS)

One recent development in the poultry industry is the production of squab broilers. These small broilers are merchandised as Rock Cornish Hens, Cornish Game Hens, etc. Even though often sold as "hens" they include both males and females. They are a delicacy and are served mostly at banquets and special dinners.

The chick is produced by mating a Cornish-type male to a meat-type, usually a White Plymouth Rock, female. The desired live market weight is 1 and 1½ pounds, which will yield a 15- to 16-ounce ready-to-cook broiler. Many producers have the chicks sexed and grow the males and females in different pens. The males are ready for market when approximately five weeks old and the females when approximately six weeks old. The males that aren't large enough at five weeks are kept and processed with the females at six weeks. The above practice isn't necessary but does give the producer a uniform product. It is very difficult to sex this particular cross at five to six weeks of age.

Chicks are given ½ to ¾ square foot of floor space. Except for a possible difference in the feeding program, they are managed the same as regular broilers. Some producers feed up to 25 percent cracked yellow corn after two weeks of age to get a better finish. The feed conversion for squab broilers is approximately 2.00 pounds of feed to one pound of chicken, live weight.

Birds of this age are very tender. Extreme care must be taken in handling and processing to be sure the skin is not torn, or the bird is not bruised. The birds may be semiscalded (126 – 129°F.) and most of the feathers removed by a rubber-fingered picker. A higher temperature will remove part of the cuticle and the carcass will not be as attractive. Most of the squab broilers are packaged in small plastic bags that shrink when placed in hot water to conform to the contour of the carcass. Squab broilers should be frozen quickly as slow freezing will cause the carcass to be discolored.

Squab broilers are sold eviscerated and frozen. Some are prestuffed with various types of fancy stuffings.

ARTICLES ON ROCK CORNISH GAME HENS

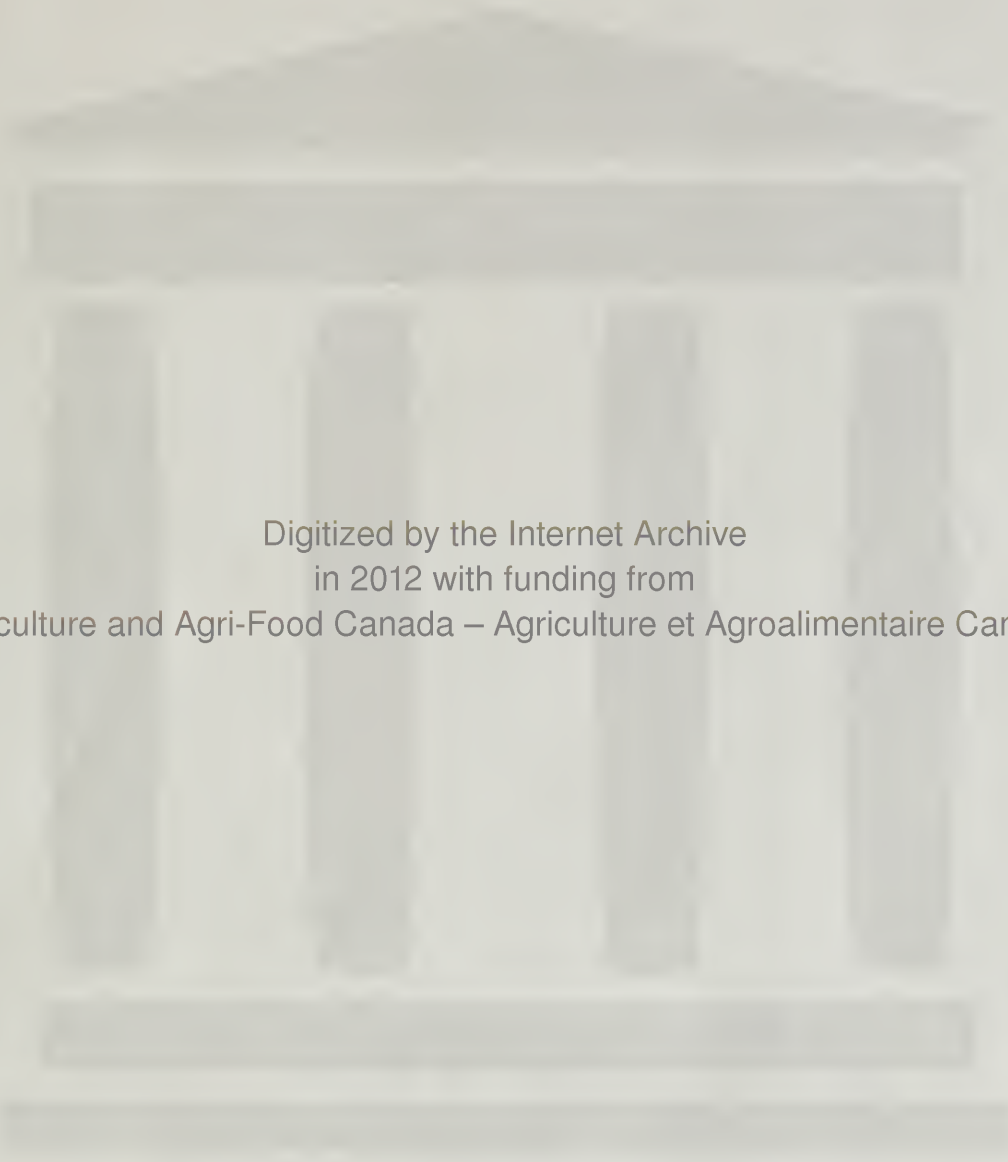
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